

Mono Basin Regional Planning Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 8, 2021, 6:30pm
remote/virtual meeting via Zoom/conference call

Members present: Kevin Brown, Lisa Cutting, Duncan King, Elin Ljung, Bartshe Miller. **Members absent:** Ronda Kauk.

Public attendees & presenters: Mono County: Bob Gardner, Justin Nalder, Bentley Regehr, Wendy Sugimura. Public: Paul Ashby, Lynn Boulton, Margaret Eissler, Stephanie Heller (USFS), Joseph Johnson (SCE), Amy Lewis, Mike Light, John Ljung, Ilene Mandelbaum, Dave Marquart, Ray Pok (SCE), David Rosky.

1. Call to order & pledge of allegiance: 6:31pm

2. Public comment:

Amy Lewis: Mono City resident working at the Tioga Pass entrance station for the National Park Service. Amy sees a lot of illegal camping along Highway 120 West on her daily commute; sees the same vans and cars at Utility Road, the 9,000-foot marker parking lot, Ellery Lake, past Tioga Pass Resort, at Tioga Lake, at the overlook. With the forest closure empty campgrounds aren't available for responsible campers but those who break the rules still get to camp. Saw more than 25 cars just last week, earlier in the summer routinely saw more than 70 cars. Amy has called the sheriff about it; can anyone from the USFS do a drive up the road? Bob will contact Sheriff Braun and request deputy sheriffs to go up there to help with the dispersed camping effort.

Lynn Boulton: New, brighter light at the airport is really disruptive to housing up above the Mobil Station; has contacted Tony Dublino about it. Elin also heard back from Tony about it; Public Works staff adjusted the angle of the light downward.

3. Review minutes from August 11, 2021: Duncan moved to approve the minutes with Bartshe added to the list of present members, Kevin seconded, motion passed unanimously.

4. Supervisor Gardner's report: Covid: Mono County's numbers are 32 cases per 100K, up from 25 per last month and 4 per in early July. The indoor mask requirement is still in place. Patient transfers to other hospitals are difficult because those facilities are full. Seeing an increase in exposure and infections in schools. Boosters are available now to those with immunocompromised systems; boosters for everyone won't necessarily be available starting September 20.

Bob had a good visit out to Glenda Bayless' home and then along Dobie Meadows Road; it was helpful to talk to Glenda and have a tour of the northeastern Mono Basin; two motorcycle riders went by on Dobie Meadows Road while Bob was there. Will focus on motorized recreation in that area this fall since it's illegal to ride on those roads; need to either enforce the current rules or make them combined-use roads; involve community in that discussion. Bartshe has noticed more "RZR" ATV use on Test Station Road lately. Lisa and other residents saw a group of about ten ATVs come through Mono City recently; illegal use is increasing and people are noticing.

Yesterday the Board of Supervisors reversed a decision not to ban camping on county roads/parking lots; the ordinance to ban camping in those areas was approved. Will soon be illegal to camp in the Hess Park parking lot, County Park parking lot, and on County roads; will be putting up signs to that effect.

5. Chair's report: None.

6. Members' reports:

Elin: Attended housing subcommittee meeting last month. Recent news about the child sexual abuse going on for years in Lee Vining was very upsetting; glad that the Sheriff's department has been working on an investigation and made an arrest; good to hear that the schools have support systems for the survivors and their families; hopefully Mono County Behavioral Health can be a resource too.

Kevin: Attended the housing subcommittee meeting.

Bartshe: Accolades and gratitude to whoever got the streetlights changed in Lee Vining to a warmer color and dimmer brightness. New airport light is a huge disruptive beacon for a good 20–30 miles. State Water Board is on the precipice of issuing amended licenses to the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power regarding streamflows and a modified Grant Lake Outlet; this has been eight years in the making and DWP is trying to railroad it by claiming that the State Water Board hasn't considered the public trust values for Mono Lake; but the Board did that back in 1994.

Lisa: Attended the housing subcommittee meeting.

7. Inyo National Forest update (Stephanie Heller): Stephanie is the first District Ranger since the late 1990s. The regional order for forest closures has been taking up all her time. The Inyo National Forest had no say about what was put in the order; the order expires September 17; hopeful that it won't get extended because it's been so impactful to business and people here; working with regional office about the Inyo writing its own order that might allow just day use.

Have a lot of Covid testing/vaccine regulations being put in place; mandatory for every employee, volunteer, and contractor to provide a self-attestation that they're vaccinated and if they're not, to be tested twice a week; haven't implemented it yet because it's burdensome and difficult.

8. Mono Basin Fire Safe Council: The August meeting covered BLM and USFS fire breaks in Mono City. Discussion about brush removal and whether Mono City Fire Department could get a chipper to be available for residents. Fire safe flyers have gone out. Dave Swisher is coordinating the emptying of green waste dumpsters. Mono County is applying for an 18-month-long California Fire Safe Council position; would be someone to coordinate with agency partners and work with residents. Next Fire Safe Council meeting is September 15 at 5:00pm.

9. Housing subcommittee: Elin summarized the subcommittee's three pronged approach: 1) determine the best piece of land for housing, 2) determine the current housing need, and 3) determine the kind of project that should be pursued. Subcommittee plans to survey community to help answer these questions. Bob mentioned that the USFS barracks should be part of the housing conversation. Stephanie outlined that the barracks currently house USFS, BLM, and State Parks employees and the USFS doesn't have enough housing at the moment, need more housing for government employees at the compound.

10. Updates on SCE substation (Ray Pok): Joseph Johnson is project manager for the “Lee Vining Rebuild Project” at the substation. He described plans to transfer all of Lee Vining to substation power that will involve outages in mid-September. Goal is to have the substation work done by the end of September; come back next year to work on the demolition of the old substation.

Historical public access: Joseph’s predecessor gave the RPAC a tour a few years ago and assured the group that public access would remain through the site. After that the USFS road that provided access from Lee Vining to the Pumice Plant was obliterated. Will that road and access be restored? Joseph and Ray responded that the plan right now is to return the road to the condition it was in with boulders to prohibit people driving through the substation, no driving or parking allowed, but pedestrian access allowed. However, it’s an energized substation and for public safety generally SCE does not want people in there. RPAC would like a tour of the area next spring when the snow allows.

Reclamation/restoration: RPAC and public expressed disappointment with the general eyesore the substation has become. Ray said the seeding is done and majority of restoration was done near the driveway from Highway 395; Joseph will put in more seed mix if the first seeding doesn’t take. Ray pointed out that one option included expanding the substation across both sides of Highway 395, which would have been much more visually impactful but would have also required SCE to do an EIR. Public recommendation that SCE should talk to local native plant restoration experts to make sure vegetation is used to solve visual and habitat impacts. SCE is constrained by state and federal standards and corporate security group’s recommendations for public safety and substation security.

Lisa: In Mono City crews in SCE-marked trucks have been clearing vegetation and brush from under power poles, which is great, but then leaving the cleared brush outside of the cleared perimeter, which increases fuel load for private properties near those poles. Ray responded that they should be hauling the cleared brush off so he’ll follow up with them.

Lisa: SCE restrooms at Lundy Dam area are now unlocked thanks to Bob contacting SCE staff.

11. Updates on Conway Ranch (Justin Nalder): Grazing operation got going late this year compared to future seasons and the lessee has asked to extend this year’s season by a few weeks; Board of Supervisors will consider that request at next week’s meeting; Justin does not think that extension would have any adverse effects. The lessee created a ten-acre corridor to avoid the “spring complex” that flows toward Wilson Creek. Cattle have not had access to the riparian corridor of Wilson Creek nor impacted the streambanks or creek bed; it’s very different than how sheep impacted the creek in the past. Cattle congregate around watering areas so will be keeping an eye on those in the future, especially if drought continues. Where County cannot supply water for cattle to drink the lessee can pump water out of County diversion points for troughs. Grazed areas have regrown after cattle were moved to different paddocks; health and diversity of vegetation is impressive. Fences will be easier to set up next year so grazing can get going earlier. Lessee was conscientious about County’s requests throughout the season. Lessee decided to graze fewer cows than they were allowed; the cap is for cow-calf pairs but they had only cows grazing this year. Justin will let Bentley know when public can access entire ranch and Bentley will distribute that to the RPAC interest list.

12. Mono Basin Community Plan Fourth Workshop: Lisa went through the plan to find items that could potentially be addressed quickly; continue these items next month to get Bob’s take (Bob had to leave meeting by this point). Continue items related to the Kutzadika’a Tribe and transportation next month.

13. Information items (planning staff): See the project updates chart here: <https://monocounty.ca.gov/rpac-mono-basin/page/mono-basin-rpac-meeting>. Reminder: RPAC is not a public comment forum; these updates are for informational purposes only.

- Hip Camp: Don't have a date for the project to come before the Planning Commission or Board of Supervisors yet.
- D&S Transfer Station: Still waiting on a complete application, which will then go back to LDTAC.
- Lee Vining Main Street Rehabilitation project: Caltrans provided an update that the project's environmental document will be completed March 2022.

14. Upcoming agenda items:

- Mono Basin Community Plan – fifth review to take place next month
- Develop list of prioritized connectivity/transportation projects
- Caltrans: Lee Vining Rehab Project (March 2022)
- SCE: Lee Vining hydro relicensing at next public input stage
- Possible Lee Vining skate park

15. Adjourned: 8:46pm